

REGULATIONS FOR SPECIFIC PRODUCTS

SELLING READY-TO-EAT FOODS



In general, “ready-to-eat” foods are foods that are considered safe and edible without any additional preparation. They are also commonly referred to as “prepared foods.” Whether called ready-to-eat or prepared foods, they are popular at farmers markets, farm stands, festivals, events, county fairs, and food trucks. Some ready-to-eat food vendors procure ingredients directly from farmers to feature local and seasonal farm products in everything from pizzas, tacos, noodles, crepes, baked goods, soups, fruit smoothies, and more.

This fact sheet includes information on:

- Examples of ready-to-eat foods.
- Retail Food Establishment Permits and Food Worker Card.
- Cottage Food Permit.

Businesses serving foods and beverages that are ready-to-eat are regulated by the Washington State Retail Food Code through local health jurisdictions, not WSDA. These businesses are classified as Retail Food Service Establishments. With some exemptions, Retail Food Establishments require permits from the local health jurisdiction, which is often the county health department.

A list of local health jurisdiction offices is found by searching the Washington Department of Health website, doh.wa.gov.

Examples of Ready-To-Eat Foods

A range of foods from salads to soups, pies to fruit smoothies are classified as “ready-to-eat.” More specifically, ready-to-eat foods include qualified cooked meat, fruits and vegetables that are held hot, and bakery items such as bread, cakes, pies, fillings, or icing for which further cooking is not required for food safety.

Ready-to-eat meat products include those produced in accordance with USDA guidelines that have received a lethality treatment for pathogens. These include dry, fermented sausages such as dry salami or pepperoni, salt-cured meat and poultry products such as prosciutto, country-cured, or Parma ham, and dried meat and poultry products such as jerky or beef sticks.

Retail Food Service Establishment Permits and Food Worker Card

Ready-to-eat food sold on-farm, at a farmers market or any event, at a food truck, a restaurant, espresso stand, produce stand, or grocery store must be prepared by a “Retail Food Establishment” permitted by the local county health jurisdiction where the product is made and sold.

Retail Food Service Establishments must prepare food in a commercial kitchen that is inspected and approved by the local health department. Because the retail permits and inspections can vary by county, it is important to contact the health department in the county where the ready-to-eat product will be prepared and served to learn about local requirements.

Not every county offers inspection and permitting of businesses that make and sell ready-to-eat meat products. Producers may need to be inspected directly by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Please see the “Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, and Other Meat” fact sheet for more information about regulations for selling meat.

Food Worker Card

Workers at a retail food establishment must have their Food Worker Card (also called Food Handler Permit), and it must be available at the workplace. The Food Worker Card course and test is available online at foodworkercard.wa.gov. The online test can be taken in English or seven other languages, including Spanish.

A study guide and additional information is available through the Washington State Department of Health’s website, doh.wa.gov, by searching “Food Worker Card.” In 2019, the cost of a Food Worker Card was \$10.


Exemptions to the Retail Food Service Establishment Permit

Businesses that handle only the following products may be able to apply for an exemption from the Retail Food Establishment Permit. Products still need to be prepared in an approved facility. Potentially exempted products:

- Individual samples of sliced fruits and vegetables.
- Corn on the cob prepared for immediate service.
- Whole peppers roasted for immediate service.
- Roasted nuts and roasted candy-coated nuts.
- Deep-fried, commercially rendered pork skins prepared for immediate service.
- Popcorn and flavored popcorn.
- Dried herbs and spices.
- Caramel apples.
- Cotton candy.
- Machine crushed ice drinks.
- Chocolate-dipped, pre-packaged ice cream bars or bananas frozen in an approved facility.

Exemptions to Retail Food Establishment Permits must be applied for from the local health department where the product will be sold. Contact the local health department for details and up-to-date list of exempt items.

Selling Ready-to-Eat Foods with a Cottage Food Permit



Washington State has a Cottage Food law that allows permitted farmers and food businesses operators to sell some specific low-risk, ready-to-eat and value-added products directly to the end consumer. The Cottage Food Operator Permit allows small food businesses to use their home kitchen to prepare these products with an inspection by WSDA. For a complete list of products and permitting information see the fact sheet “Cottage Food Permit.”

RECOMMENDED FACT SHEETS



- 5. Licensing
- 23. WSDA Food Processor License and Facilities
- 24. Cottage Food Permit
- 27. Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat, and Other Meat